



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

J. HERBERT NELSON, II
STATED CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

April 4, 2019

Honorable Iván Duque
President of the Republic of Colombia
Carrera 8 No. 7 -26 Palacio de Nariño
Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Duque,

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I write to express my dismay at your decision of March 10, 2019, to object to significant aspects of the legislation regulating the functions and mandate of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, known as JEP.

The denomination I serve, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has been in partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Colombia since 1856. In the last two decades, we have supported and accompanied the Presbyterian Church of Colombia in their task as peacemakers walking together with displaced and threatened communities. Our primary concern is to continue to accompany the Colombian church in this task, because the voice of the vulnerable often is not heard by those in power and their needs are often overlooked. As Christians, we are called to support reconciliation and wholeness for the people of Colombia, for all peoples, and for all of Creation.

We are deeply concerned by your apparent lack of support for the peace process. We have witnessed in recent months how your actions have placed at risk key features of the Peace Accords, threatening the guarantees that allowed thousands of ex-combatants to lay down their weapons. The people that have suffered most from this decades-long conflict continue to be those on the margins of society: the millions of displaced persons and the landless rural poor. Their collective support for the peace process should be a compelling reason for your government to demonstrate a sincere commitment to building upon the progress that has been achieved.

Finally, I note that the JEP was given the authority to investigate the most heinous of war crimes: sexual violence against children. I am appalled by your recent objections that seek to eliminate this vital part of the JEP's mandate. While that may appear to allow for harsher penalties, the testimony of numerous organizations of women and victims highlights the appallingly low rates of conviction for sexual abusers in Colombia's judicial system. You likely create a disincentive for perpetrators to be forthcoming with the truth and reparations if they face a harsh prison sentence. I fear that the chance of swift and meaningful justice for these victims will be threatened rather than advanced by the removal of the regulations to which you have objected.

As I and other U.S. Presbyterians have traveled throughout your beautiful land, we have always been inspired by the compassion and solidarity that undergird the Colombian people, despite so many years of conflict. As people of faith, our hope is that a new generation can taste the fruits of reconciliation and grow to adulthood in a just and peaceful land. We will work to ensure that the government of the United States contributes to peace with justice in Colombia, not more violence. We pray that you will do the same.

I look forward to your response.

In the faith we share,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Herbert Nelson, II". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)